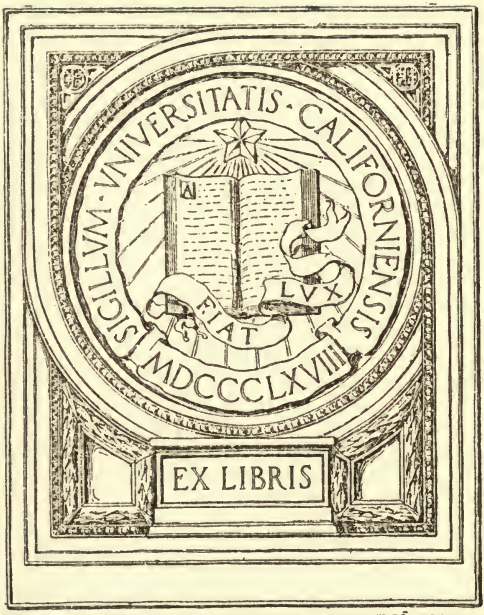
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LITTLE STORIES

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BY

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I

A CONSULTATION

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BOTH men were physicians. The older of the two was far on in a life of success. The man he bade be seated had blue eyes, and was the owner of forty well-used years.

"Glad to see you, John," said the older man. He was about to add, "You look worried," but, on second thought, said only:

"What can I do for you?"

"You can listen to me for ten minutes."

"As long as you like; you know we do that all day. Don't hurry."

"You know, doctor, that I was once engaged to Helen Daunton. That was ten years ago."

"Yes—I know. Quite so; yes—

yes—remember it well—yes."

The younger man said: "No, you do not know, and don't say 'Yes—yes' that way."

The gray head turned with a quick side glance of questioning observation, and knew at once that this was a man to be taken with care. He said: "Go on, John; I interrupted you."

"I fell ill; I went to India and Australia. When I came back she was married, the wife of—of all men—Wanfell, the banker. He was thirty years older than she. What! what was I saying? I mean, she was thirty years younger than he. I did not know why she did it. Now I know."

The older man said: "I remember her well. She was beautiful—but—"

John interrupted hastily: "That's unnecessary. I wish you would listen."

Here he rose and bent over his

friend, who remained seated, a hand on his cheek, intent and a little anxious.

"This fellow Wanfell was my father's partner, and—ruined him."

"Yes—yes."

"Oh, damn it! Don't say 'Yes—yes' that way."

The hazel eyes below the gray hair became more tenderly attentive.

"Pardon me, John. I sometimes forget how to listen."

"Well, don't do that again; I—I—can't bear it. I have hoped the years would give me a chance—I mean—I hoped that man would some day be in my power. He is! He was—and now—now—" Here he paused, and then went on: "What was it I was saying? Oh, that woman!"

The older physician laid a hand on his arm.

"You were saying, John, I think—"

"No—no; you asked me why she married that scoundrel."

"No, my dear fellow, I did not ask—"

"But your eyes asked."

"You must excuse them. The curiosity of the eyes is not to be governed. But—go on. What else is there? Tell me quietly."

John sat down.

"Quietly! My God! You know, sir, I have never cared for any other woman. She has always had my—love. I have kept away from her. We have met but twice in a chance way, and once for a mad moment. Now, sir, now—oh, that woman, that woman! I—knew she could not help it—and she is—she is—"

"Drop her, John, and tell me what you want of me."

"I will—I will. It is just this: A

week ago, late, about eleven at night, a servant came in haste with a note from her. Would I come instantly to see—Wanfell. He had had a fit. I went; of course I went. She said I must keep—the case. God help and pardon me, I did—I did!"

"Why did you?"

"Why do you ask me? You know—well enough."

"Are you still in charge?"

"Yes. He is very ill; half conscious; a decayed beast. He may die any moment—*any* moment, or drag on for years—*years*."

"I see."

"No, you do not. Every day she says: 'How long will he last? Will he die soon? It is cruel to try to keep him alive!'"

"People often say that," said the older physician.

"I know; but you understand. Don't trifle with me. I told you what she said, and you should not want me to say more. I will not—"

"Whatever I can do for you I will do."

"Then take this case off my hands. You or some one must—take it."

"Very well, John; I—"

"It is n't well at all! Help me now—at once. Can't you see my—my trouble?"

"Yes; I saw it all along. I will help you. It is easy—"

"Easy! Nothing is easy. I say, I cannot stand it! That half-dead dog—and that—that woman!"

He stood up and went on: "Now do you think I was right to yield—to stay on—stay on? Pity me! I had two good—I mean two bad—reasons—the man and the woman. I am

plain, you see."

He laughed, and it was not a laugh good to hear.

"I shall be frank with you, my friend. You were wrong; you hate him, and you love—"

John broke in: "Don't say that kind of thing! Don't hint it!"

"But, my dear fellow—"

"We won't discuss it. I am the person concerned. You let him alone—and her, too. You never were in the hell of a marriage like that. What must I do? I want to be made to do something—forced—"

"Be quiet a moment. Sit down and I will answer you."

He took out his watch and laid a finger on his friend's pulse. Presently he looked up, and said, smiling:

"You have consulted me, and now, as your doctor, I say, my dear fellow,

that you are in no state to practise medicine."

"That is so."

"Neither are you fit to have the charge of a man who may die at any moment—"

"And who ought to die, damn him!"

"Yes; but it must not be while he is in your care. Go out of town—at once, to-day. Do not write to her. I will call and explain it all to her—to Mrs. Wanfell."

"Yes—you will do that—and I am ill, very ill. Thank you. Don't you think I ought to see her before I go?"

"I do not. Promise me that you will not."

"I will not—see her. Oh, never, never!"

"Stay away three weeks."

"How can I?"

"You must. Now go."

"Where is my hat?"

"Here. Now I have your word. In a day or two you will be glad you went."

John left him, saying: "Thank you. Yes, I am sick enough—soul-sick."

The older man went with him to the door. Returning, he sat down and, playing with his watch-guard, was still a little while, and then spoke aloud the final conclusion of his reflections, which was a way he had:

"It is very easy to let a man die. I was wise to make him run away from it. If he had done his best and that rascal died, he would have lived in the shadow of remorse, where no crime had been; and if—" Here he ceased to speak. But by and by he murmured, as he rose: "What of the woman? A

touch and a look may say, 'Do it!' He has told but half."

The younger man went to Aiken and played golf. At the close of a fortnight he received two telegrams; one was from the doctor. He went home the next day, but did not go to the funeral of Wanfell.

As the years went by, some of his friends wondered why he did not marry the woman he had once loved. When the old doctor's wife was thus curious, her husband said that he believed he knew why, but would never tell.

When urged to explain himself, he stated, at last, that it was all clearly set forth in the New Testament.

II

TWO MEN

TWO MEN

"THESE OUGHT YE TO DO, AND NOT TO LEAVE THE OTHERS UNDONE."

A PALE young man sat down on a bench in the park behind the reservoir on Forty-second Street. He put a torn bag of tools under the bench.

A small, sallow man came behind him. He stooped to steal the bag.

The pale man turned, and said in a slow, tired way: "Drop that. It ain't worth stealing."

The other said: "Not if you 're lookin'."

The pale man set the bag at his feet, and said:

"It 's a poor business you 're in."

"You don't look as if yours was any better." He sat down. "What 's your callin'?"

"I 'm an iron-worker; bridge-work."

"Don't look strong enough."

"That 's so. I 'm just out of Bellevue Hospital; got hurt three months ago."

"I 'm just out of hospital, too."

"What hospital?" said the bridge-builder.

"Sing Sing."

"What? Jail?"

"Yes; not bad in winter, either. There 's a society helps a fellow after you quit that hospital. Gives you good clothes, too."

"Clothes? Is that so?"

"Gets you work—"

"Work—good God! I wish they 'd get me some."

"You ain't bad enough. Go and grab somethin'. Get a short sentence; first crime. Come out, and get looked after by nice ladies."

"My God!"

"Did n't they do nothin' for you when you got out of that hospital?"

"No! Why the devil should they? I 'm only an honest mechanic. Are you goin'?"

He felt his loneliness.

"Yes; I 've got to go after that job. It 'll give me time to look about me. Gosh! but you look bad! Good-by."

The sallow man rose, looked back, jingled the few coins in his pocket, hesitated, and walked away whistling.

The pale man sat still on the bench, staring down at the ragged bag of tools at his feet.

III

HAROUN THE CALIPH

HAROUN THE CALIPH

HAROUN the Caliph, walking by night in Bagdad, saw one standing without the great closed doors of the bazaar of the gold-workers with naught upon him but his frail khamees, and it was cold. "Whose art thou?" said the Caliph.

"I am a merchant of amulets," returned the man. "I am starving, and I sold my coverings one by one, as a tree in autumn letteth a fierce wind have its leaves, rather than fall a heap and die. I am a child of misery from my birth."

Then said the Caliph, "Take this, eat, drink, and be merry," and he gave him the great ruby which men call the "Eye of Love," and went on his way

in peace. The next night Haroun came again, and, finding the merchant of amulets about to die for want of food, cried, "Alas! why did not you sell my jewel, and live?"

Then answered the dying man: "Some said it was false, some said it was stolen, and none would buy. It is as when Allah gives a too great gift of soul to a lowly man—it getteth him only the food of mockery. But now I have the amulet called death, and I shall no more hunger or care."

Upon this the man died, and the Caliph took the "Eye of Love" from the clutch of death and went his way hand in hand with thought.

IV

THE WATERS OF OBLIVION

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Two years after the Mutiny, John Hughes, a young captain of infantry, was stationed at Meerut. This man knew many tongues and loved to wrestle with dialects. One hot day in the bazaar he entered a book-shop and among piles of trash fell upon a thin pamphlet. It was stitched between purple paper covers, and, as he soon made out, was a manuscript in Pali.

Now, Pali is a tongue which few white men understand. It delighted the captain, who paid a trifle and put the leaves in his pocket. He dined at the mess. Returning late that night to his quarters, he found the book on his table, where his servant had laid it.

He made himself comfortable,

lighted a cheroot, and took up the pamphlet. Yes, it was written with care in Pali, of which he knew something. He remembered that a certain reverend, a mission priest, had made a full vocabulary of this tongue. He got up and after some search found it, and sat down again to enjoy the pleasing exasperations of a language of which he knew enough to be preassured of the difficulties it presented. But first he looked the little book over. The covers, of a purple which was unlike other purples, were faded, worn, and frayed. Usually these second-hand bazaar books had queer smells by which their past might be guessed. The little purple manuscript had a faint fragrance which vainly taxed his remembrance for the place where he had known it.

As he ran over the pages he saw

that some one had made marginal comments of small importance. At the end of the book were written four lines, in a very minute English script, and, as he concluded, by a woman's hand. The ink had faded and it was so hard to read by candle-light that he gave up the effort, thinking that it would be easier to make out by day.

The book was his real attraction. He settled himself for a bout with its meanings, as eager as a traveller in a strange land.

On the inside of the front cover was written in a large masculine hand:

"*This Book was once a Man.*"

The phrase pleased him.

"I like that," he said aloud. "That ought to be put over the door of a library." He wondered if it were a quotation, or if the reading of the manuscript had prompted it.

He looked around the room. There were books everywhere, on chair and table: a few in his own language,—the greater books,—and many in the tongues of the East. Some were native manuscripts. He felt for a time as though the room were spirit-haunted. A dreamy pleasure in the thought kept his fancy busy for a while, and he said aloud: "Yes, every book was once a man."

At last he returned to the purple-tinted little volume, saying to himself: "So two other English people have handled and perhaps read it." That alone gave the script unusual interest, for few of his own race read Pali.

It began thus:

"I, Abdallah, a man of Ceylon, on the ninth day of the seventh moon, being now in my thirty-first year, here set down certain things for my own

remembrance. I shall write of my search for the Well of the Waters of Forgetfulness. I am assured by the wise moonshee Salak Bey that in them a man may wash away remembrance and be as the dead who are born again, without memories of the life they have lost. Thus shall I cease to know that in anger I slew him I loved best, my father's son."

"By George!" said the captain. "What a queer find!"

He sat a little while with the booklet open on his knee. Had it been written in English and had he been in his own land, he would have smiled at this dreamer or mystic. But the East is the East and he had lived much among its people.

He returned to the pages and slowly and painfully made out their meaning, finding it even harder because of being

in written characters. There were in all, or had been, as he counted, sixty-three pages. Two were missing in part, as he saw by the torn remainders.

For the most part it was a record of distances travelled, of visits to noted temples, and of vast foot-sore wanderings. Here and there were bits of more personal reflection. Over these the captain paused, being a man of imaginative turn and able to enter sympathetically into the ways of the native mind. "Ah!" he exclaimed, as he made clear to himself this passage:

"If I find what I seek and so lose remembrance of all that has been, whither will have gone the thoughts of my life? Shall I never meet them again? Surely. The thoughts of a man do not die, but are fragments of the eternal mind, and go hence whither they came; being as children that are

born, and, dying, live again elsewhere."

A little further he read: "If I lose all memory, and have release from the hell of seeing the dead always at my feet, in his blood, I shall forget, too, my wife and my son. I must decide to keep my anguish and my love—or to part with both. I have made my choice."

Again he read:

"I have lost by my own act a man dear to me. I have both the grief and the sin. Long have I wandered in the land of sorrow. There every man is alone, and there is no language, for in the land of sorrow there is but one inhabitant."

"Great Buddha! but that is all pretty grim," said the reader, and went on with rapt attention. As he read, the manuscript became harder to decipher, the ink paler, the letters ill-

formed, blurred, or giving signs of tremor. At last he came on a date, and knew that the writer must have been many years wandering. A man in the vigor of life wrote the first lines; it was an old man who wrote the last.

"Clearly insane from remorse," thought the captain.

It was now far into the night, but still the indistinct pages held him, as he read on and on, finding now and then that words he should have known well obliged him to pause and search for elusive meanings. He concluded at length that his brain was tired and had the uncertainty of action which over-tired muscles exhibit. He reluctantly laid aside the little book and undressed. When ready for bed, his curiosity prevailing, he took it up again, reading with increase of difficulty. Near the close he found this passage,

which at once reassured his reason as to the unhappy writer's delusion:

"At last I knew at morning that it was near, and now at evening I have found the valley, and the seven red stones as the moonshee described them.

"I am here, where the years and long travel have brought me. The vale slopes sharply and is clad with bamboos. A path winds among them, and here is that I seek. An abounding spring rises up, in vast flow, and must return whither it came, for it has no outlet. The earth continually takes back what it gave. This is as I was told. The Well of the Waters of Forgetfulness. Here I have sat long in thought. At last I take out my pen and write. Soon all the past will fade by degrees and never after shall I know it. Even what I write will be as

if it were the story of what another wrote. My brother will be avenged even in my relief, because I shall no more see those I love, or know them as my own. I sit here in the shadows and think on what has been and what will be. I shall feel the world of memories fading like a tablet that is cleansed. It will come slowly; I shall feel the joy of forgetting.

"I have washed in the spring and wondered. It is not like the waters of earth. It does not wet the hand or head, but it is as if a cool wind went over them. And now I dip in it my garments, and write in haste, being aware that all my past life is growing dim to me. Let my latest words be of thanks."

Here followed a few lines, under which the hand of a woman had written the words which the reader had

observed on his first look at the manuscript. He was now too eager to wait. He found a magnifying-glass, and then easily read this rendering of the final lines:

By the waters of oblivion
I sat down and wept;
By the waters of oblivion
Life slumbered and slept.

Then she had added: "Would that I also could find them—or forgiveness."

Again the captain sat quiet in thought, wondering who and what the woman was. The strangeness of this wild story held him, and he smiled at the feeling of how near he was to accepting it as true. But he had felt before the spell of the Eastern world. At last he rose and looked about him. He had a baffling sensation of everything in the room being remote from him, and of a little trouble in recalling

something to which he was to attend next day. He dismissed it, acknowledging anew the scholar's experience of the effect of mental tension, which had gone far beyond the mere needs of the translation. He went to bed, and lay a long while thinking about the man's madness, and seeing the gaunt white figure in the bamboo grove, bending over what he believed to be the waters of oblivion. Then he slept.

At morning his servant awakened him, and said: "The bath is ready; the sahib's garments are here. The sahib was hard to waken, and he will be late for parade."

The young man sat up, and said: "Who are you? Where am I?"

The man repeated his statement, as Hughes got out of bed.

The servant left him.

Hughes said long afterwards, when

he told me this tale:

"I sat down and tried to recall something which I had done the night before. I could not. I found the room unusual, rather than altogether new. I forgot the parade, and began to look at this and that. I was like a ship in a fog which now clears, and leaves only a thin mist, and then isolates the ship in gray aloofness.

"I remembered that I must clap my hands when I wanted something. I did so; my man came back. I asked:

"'What are these for?' pointing to my equipments.

"He said: 'The captain sahib's uniform.'

"I took up a photograph, and asked who it was. It seemed to me a beautiful woman.

"'Great Allah! it is the lady the captain sahib will marry.'

"I laughed, and said inanely: 'I—I don't remember.'

"On this the man fled.

"I recall nothing else, but they said I slept two days. An ass of a doctor declared I had had sunstroke. It was nonsense. I was up the third day, and as fit as anybody. However, something was wrong with me. I think that now I know very well what it was. I was a month at Simla before I entirely recovered my memory, and to this day the photograph of my wife has, now and then, that curious look of far-away-ness I had felt about things in my room.

"Soon after our marriage I told my wife this rather queer story. The next day she burned the book, and, as she told me, did not even open it, which I thought wise, interesting, and unusual. As for the sunstroke, that is bosh, and India is a very bewildering country."

V

CONVERSION

CONVERSION

A Sufi dervish, the father of sorrow and the son of grief, sat at night by the sea. The waves like sleek serpents writhed at his feet, and hissed forth, "Come, let us strangle thee and thy griefs, and make an end."

"Ah, welcome death!" he answered. Then a greater billow, rolling in, covered him, and went back, and the man was very wet. Thereupon he went home and dried his clothes.

VI

A MAN AND A WOMAN

It was midnight and very dark. At times the moon shone clear between hurrying storm-clouds. The river was in flood and over the wharves. The waters, checked by the stone piers, rose high, and swept in tumult under the arches of the bridge. Over it a man walked with quick steps. He stood still midway, and stared at the black current as it swept on with here and there flashes of foam.

Along the farther footway a woman moved slowly. The man climbed to the parapet and threw himself into the flood.

He rose, aware of the instinctive desire to live. But death was sweeter. He threw up his arms that he might

sink, and have his will, and die. A white thing went by him. Something stronger than the longing for death mastered him. He caught at the woman, and held up her head. He must save her—he knew that. He set his skilled strength to the task. The flashes of light on the water went by. The woman made no struggle. At last there were no more wharves, and all was dark. He felt the water to be less wilful. By degrees he neared the shore, touched with his feet the soft ooze beneath, and staggered up a grass slope with his burden. Was she dead? It seemed horrible. No! He felt her heart beat. She was young and slight; more he could not see.

He laid her down, and began to move and chafe her limbs, saying to himself: "Why did I save her? She had a right to choose death." Then he

laughed low, and said aloud: "But it is she who has saved me—and here am I with a half-dead woman I have pulled out of the water with no more thought than a dog gives to the stick he fetches!"

As he thus murmured, he did not cease from his efforts. After a little, disturbed at his failure, he remembered what he must do. He set his mouth to hers, and breathed into her the breath of life. A strange joy came to him as he knew that her bosom moved, and she drew breath after breath. He sat beside her, rubbing her hands, not knowing what more to do. Again and again she moved, and at last the hand he held closed feebly on his—although the woman was still but half alive. The weak grasp was like an appeal, and the man knew that he had here a thing to care for and

assist—a woman—another woman!

Suddenly, through the deep darkness of the night, he heard her say:

"Where am I?"

He rose in haste, murmuring:

"My God! it is my wife!"

He turned to leave her, but could not. Then, as she seemed less conscious, he began again to chafe her limbs.

An hour went by while she muttered, wandering in her speech. The man listened, still rubbing her limbs with slow, mechanic action. At last she sat up of a sudden and, seeing nothing clearly, for the night was very dark, said:

"What is all this? Who are you?"

"I am Harry—Stilla, you are safe."

The woman rose to her knees with a faint cry, and fell back into his arms, crying:

"But I wanted to die! Oh, I did

want to die! You saved me—why did you save me?"

"I do not know."

"But I know—you tried to save an unknown woman. Thank you for her, but oh, not—not for me."

He told her all the truth, and of his own will to die.

Then she fell upon his shoulder and cried out: "I was dead—and am alive again. Will you—oh, will you not believe me, Harry? As one come from the dead you must, you must."

"Yes, I will believe you."

"I never—did. They lied—"

"I believe you, Stilla."

"Let us go. I am cold."

He helped her to rise, and then, finding her too feeble to walk, took her in his arms.

"See," he said, "the moon is out. There is light—light!"

VII

A GHOST OF GLORY

A GHOST OF GLORY

It was after dinner, and had just struck three bells. The ward-room of the *Oregon* was at its best. As I was not a navy man, but only a guest, all the sea-tales were let loose on me. They had been well salted through many voyages and perhaps through many centuries, but were always accepted as fresh.

At last there was a long pause, and the third-watch officer ceased to punctuate the talk with twang of the banjo.

The doctor said: "Is n't it your turn now, Mr. Smith?"

I said: "Yes, I will tell you a short sea-story no one of you has ever heard."

The first lieutenant said that was in-

credible and bets of cigars were freely offered that it would prove an old forecastle yarn.

I took all the bets and said I hoped there would be no musical accompaniment. Then some one took away the third-watch officer's instrument of torture, and I told my story.

"In 1864 I was sent by our government to Great Britain on a certain legal errand which has no connection with my tale. Having got through with a tedious business, I wandered about England and at last went to Scotland, where certain matters on the Clyde interested our people. For the purpose of hearing how the lower classes felt about our Civil War, I used to go of an evening into the inns in Glasgow where sailors collect, and take a pipe and a mug of ale.

"One night I fell in with a hairy

old sea-dog just come ashore. A glass or two set him talking. After a while he asked me if I believed in ghost ships. I replied that of course I did; if we had ghosts on shore, why not on the sea?

"'Well,' he said, 'if you 'd 'a' said no, I would n't have went on.' He did go on, and this is what my sailorman said:

"'I was in a collier last week,—that was June the 19th,—runnin' up the coast. We were about eight miles off Flamborough Head. A Sunday mornin' it was, and just struck seven bells. It was rainin' solid and blowin' a gale; had n't no reefs in the wind, nuther. I was on the bow lookin' out ahead. On a sudden the rain let up a bit, and there on the port bow, plain as this pipe, was the darnedest-lookin' ship I ever seed. She was all a wrack

and half covered with seaweed. Her stays was half gone and sails tore and ropes hangin' about. I sung out to the mate to come quick, and he come, and the master and me, all three, seed her. At first the mate said she was a derelict. There was no one on deck, and she was havin' pretty much her own way. Might 'a' bin a quarter-mile away, or less; anyway, she was plain to be seen. The mate looked at her with the glass, and he said she had guns on deck and was a kind of old-time-lookin' war-ship. The queerest of all was, she had a flag at her mizzen; I saw it easy. It was like that damned Yankee rag, but did n't have so many stars. Just as the rain was a-thickenin'—now, don't say I'm a liar, 'cause I'm not.'

"I gave that man my entire trust, and I said as much.

"'Well, just as she was gettin' dim-

mer, she began to let go with them guns. "My gosh!" says the mate, and save my heart, but we counted thirteen guns, one after another, and no time lost. Then the master he said he 'd had enough and too much, and we went about. We did n't see her no more. I suppose you don't think I saw that ship. I was n't in liquor, nor the mate nuther.'

"'And you heard the guns?'

"'I did, and them guns was heard ashore, too. I know two men and a preacher heered 'em.'

"After that my sailorman went away. I think the evidence good, because the man who saw the ship did not take it for anything except a strange sea-sight and because he could not have invented just that number of guns as fired."

When I had told my tale the first

lieutenant said: "That is a fine yarn, but what the deuce had the thirteen guns to do with it?"

Some of the others smiled, and the doctor said it was not very plain to him; such stories were common enough. The third-watch officer, who writes sea-songs and sonnets, said:

"I don't think one of you got on to it. Why, that ship was the *Bon Homme Richard.*"

"Yes," said I, "and log this too, you unimaginative sea-dogs. The *Kearsarge* sank the *Alabama* off Cherbourg, that Sunday morning, at what you call seven bells."

They agreed that it was a first-class sea-story and we were told of two other ghost ships, until at last the old engineer, who had retired into his beard and such a column of smoke as went before the Hebrews, remarked:

"It's good and it's true, but it's only half new. Mr. Smith has lost his cigars."

I asked for proof, and the officer replied:

"Here it is: Tom Bushby, our old quartermaster on the *Hartford*,—he's laid by now at the Naval Home,—Tom told me in 1850 that in 1812 he was a boy on the privateer *Rattlesnake*. They were before the wind and off that very same Flamborough Head. It was seven o'clock in the evening on the nineteenth day of August. There was no fog. As they were in hostile seas, the lookout was smart. This same ship was seen a mile away; she fired her thirteen guns, too. He said they tacked to get a clearer sight of her, but, somehow, she was gone. Tom said she just settled down and sank quietly under the smoke of

her guns, with that same old flag flying."

"Well, what then?" said the first lieutenant.

"What then? Why, just at that hour and on that day the *Constitution* disposed of the *Guerrière*."

"Bets lost, Mr. Smith," said the doctor.

The first lieutenant remarked skeptically that he would like to know whether in that last yarn there was any time-allowance for difference in longitude, as the capture of the *Guerrière* took place off the coast of Nova Scotia.

"Oh, don't!" said the gentleman who made verses. "You don't believe in anything."

"Yes, by Jove! I do."

"In what, sir? Trot out your creed. You don't own any one belief that

is n't foggy with doubt. What do you believe?"

"I believe in the flag and in rapid-fire guns."

"Good!" said I. "Let 's turn in."

And it struck four bells.

VIII

THE WISE MAN'S SACK

At noon prayer, on a Friday, in Ramazan, the Caliph looked from the Maksurah and saw the Khateb exhorting the many who were poor or sad by reason of death, and who daily went to and fro from the house of weeping to the grave of loss, and found neither peace in one nor forgetfulness in the other. At last, seeing that none shed their sorrows or sought comfort, but still slept on the bed of grief and watered the pillows of lamentation, the Khateb descended from his seat, and sat himself by the fountain in the courtyard, and one by one repeated the Hundred Sacred Names, and murmured "the words light on the tongues of men and heavy in the balance of

God." Then came one, a teller of tales, and the son of a teller of tales, and the father of all such as listen to a tale and love it. And as the Khateb murmured and mumbled, the teller of tales lifted his voice to the faithful and said:

"Once in a strange land a king took a city and, meaning to destroy it, bade each dweller therein to carry away with him what most he valued. Some took gold and some food, but one a great sack. Said the king, 'What is that you carry?' And the man replied, 'It is full of laughter.' To him returned the king, 'You are wise. I have forgotten how to laugh. Divide with me.' Whereon said the man, 'Allah teacheth charity. Take what you will.' And the king took, and grew gay with the wine of mirth, and said, 'This shall ransom the city.' As for

him who bore the sack, he made him lord over all who cannot smile."

Such as heard this story were moved to merriment and forgot to weep. But the saint cried, "When death taketh thy city, canst thou carry away a sack of laughter?"

"I know not," said the teller of tales; "Allah, who maketh all, is maker of mirth as of grief. Some say, 'Who wins, laughs;' but I, 'Who laughs, wins.' Therefore let us fill our mule bags with laughter and our camel bags with mirth, and wait for the king to destroy this city of earth."

IX

A DILEMMA

A DILEMMA

I WAS just thirty-seven when my Uncle Philip died. A week before that event he sent for me; and here let me say that I had never set eyes on him. He hated my mother, but I do not know why. She told me long before his last illness that I need expect nothing from my father's brother. He was an inventor, an able and ingenious mechanical engineer, and had made much money by his improvement in turbine-wheels. He was a bachelor; lived alone, cooked his own meals, and collected precious stones, especially rubies and pearls. From the time he made his first money he had this mania. As he grew richer, the desire to possess rare and costly gems

became stronger. When he bought a new stone, he carried it in his pocket for a month and now and then took it out and looked at it. Then it was added to the collection in his safe at the trust company.

At the time he sent for me I was a clerk, and poor enough. Remembering my mother's words, his message gave me, his sole relative, no new hopes; but I thought it best to go.

When I sat down by his bedside, he began, with a malicious grin:

"I suppose you think me queer. I will explain." What he said was certainly queer enough. "I have been living on an annuity into which I put my fortune. In other words, I have been, as to money, concentric half of my life to enable me to be as eccentric as I pleased the rest of it. Now I repent of my wickedness to you all, and desire

to live in the memory of at least one of my family. You think I am poor and have only my annuity. You will be profitably surprised. I have never parted with my precious stones; they will be yours. You are my sole heir. I shall carry with me to the other world the satisfaction of making one man happy.

"No doubt you have always had expectations, and I desire that you should continue to expect. My jewels are in my safe. There is nothing else left."

When I thanked him he grinned all over his lean face, and said:

"You will have to pay for my funeral."

I must say that I never looked forward to any expenditure with more pleasure than to what it would cost me to put him away in the earth. As

I rose to go, he said:

"The rubies are valuable. They are in my safe at the trust company. Before you unlock the box, be very careful to read a letter which lies on top of it; and be sure not to shake the box." I thought this odd. "Don't come back. It won't hasten things."

He died that day week, and was handsomely buried. The day after, his will was found, leaving me his heir. I opened his safe and found in it nothing but an iron box, evidently of his own making, for he was a skilled workman and very ingenious. The box was heavy and strong, about ten inches long, eight inches wide and ten inches high. On it lay a letter to me. It ran thus:

"DEAR TOM: This box contains a large number of very fine pigeon-blood rubies and a fair lot of diamonds;

one is blue—a beauty. There are hundreds of pearls—one the famous green pearl and a necklace of blue pearls, for which any woman would sell her soul—or her affections." I thought of Susan. "I wish you to continue to have expectations and continuously to remember your dear uncle. I would have left these stones to some charity, but I hate the poor as much as I hate your mother's son,—yes, rather more.

"The box contains an interesting mechanism, which will act with certainty as you unlock it, and explode ten ounces of my improved, supersensitive dynamite—no, to be accurate, there are only nine and a half ounces. Doubt me, and open it, and you will be blown to atoms. Believe me, and you will continue to nourish expectations which will never be fulfilled. As

a considerate man, I counsel extreme care in handling the box. Don't forget your affectionate

"UNCLE."

I stood appalled, the key in my hand. Was it true? Was it a lie? I had spent all my savings on the funeral, and was poorer than ever.

Remembering the old man's oddity, his malice, his cleverness in mechanic arts, and the patent explosive which had helped to make him rich, I began to feel how very likely it was that he had told the truth in this cruel letter.

I carried the iron box away to my lodgings, set it down with care in a closet, laid the key on it, and locked the closet.

Then I sat down, as yet hopeful, and began to exert my ingenuity upon ways of opening the box without being killed. There must be a way.

After a week of vain thinking I bethought me, one day, that it would be easy to explode the box by unlocking it at a safe distance, and I arranged a plan with wires, which seemed as if it would answer. But when I reflected on what would happen when the dynamite scattered the rubies, I knew that I should be none the richer. For hours at a time I sat looking at that box and handling the key.

At last I hung the key on my watch-guard; but then it occurred to me that it might be lost or stolen. Dreading this, I hid it, fearful that some one might use it to open the box. This state of doubt and fear lasted for weeks, until I became nervous and began to dread that some accident might happen to that box. A burglar might come and boldly carry it away and force it open and find it was a wicked

fraud of my uncle's. Even the rumble and vibration caused by the heavy vans in the street became at last a terror.

Worst of all, my salary was reduced, and I saw that marriage was out of the question.

In my despair I consulted Professor Clinch about my dilemma, and as to some safe way of getting at the rubies. He said that, if my uncle had not lied, there was none that would not ruin the stones, especially the pearls, but that it was a silly tale and altogether incredible. I offered him the biggest ruby if he wished to test his opinion. He did not desire to do so.

Dr. Schaff, my uncle's doctor, believed the old man's letter, and added a caution, which was entirely useless, for by this time I was afraid to be in the room with that terrible box.

At last the doctor kindly warned me that I was in danger of losing my mind with too much thought about my rubies. In fact, I did nothing else but contrive wild plans to get at them safely. I spent all my spare hours at one of the great libraries reading about dynamite. Indeed, I talked of it until the library attendants, believing me a lunatic or a dynamite fiend, declined to humor me, and spoke to the police. I suspect that for a while I was "shadowed" as a suspicious, and possibly criminal, character. I gave up the libraries, and, becoming more and more fearful, set my precious box on a down pillow, for fear of its being shaken; for at this time even the absurd possibility of its being disturbed by an earthquake troubled me. I tried to calculate the amount of shake needful to explode my box.

The old doctor, when I saw him again, begged me to give up all thought of the matter, and, as I felt how completely I was the slave of one despotic idea, I tried to take the good advice thus given me.

Unhappily, I found, soon after, between the leaves of my uncle's Bible, a numbered list of the stones with their cost and much beside. It was dated two years before my uncle's death. Many of the stones were well known, and their enormous value amazed me.

Several of the rubies were described with care, and curious histories of them were given in detail. One was said to be the famous "Sunset ruby," which had belonged to the Empress-Queen Maria Theresa. One was called the "Blood ruby," not, as was explained, because of the color, but on account of the murders it had occa-

sioned. Now, as I read, it seemed again to threaten death.

The pearls were described with care as an unequalled collection. Concerning two of them my uncle had written what I might call biographies,— for, indeed, they seemed to have done much evil and some good. One, a black pearl, was mentioned in an old bill of sale as—She—which seemed queer to me.

It was maddening. Here, guarded by a vision of sudden death, was wealth "beyond the dreams of avarice." I am not a clever or ingenious man; I know little beyond how to keep a ledger, and so I was, and am, no doubt, absurd about many of my notions as to how to solve this riddle.

At one time I thought of finding a man who would take the risk of unlocking the box, but what right had I to subject any one else to the trial I

dared not face? I could easily drop the box from a height somewhere, and if it did not explode could then safely unlock it; but if it did blow up when it fell, good-by to my rubies. *Mine*, indeed! I was rich, and I was not. I grew thin and morbid, and so miserable that, being a good Catholic, I at last carried my troubles to my father confessor. He thought it simply a cruel jest of my uncle's, but was not so eager for another world as to be willing to open my box. He, too, counselled me to cease thinking about it. Good heavens! I dreamed about it. Not to think about it was impossible. Neither my own thought nor science nor religion had been able to assist me.

Two years have gone by, and I am one of the richest men in the city, and have no more money than will keep me alive.

Susan said I was half cracked like Uncle Philip, and broke off her engagement. In my despair I have advertised in the "Journal of Science," and have had absurd schemes sent me by the dozen. At last, as I talked too much about it, the thing became so well known that when I put the horror in a safe, in bank, I was promptly desired to withdraw it. I was in constant fear of burglars, and my landlady gave me notice to leave, because no one would stay in the house with that box. I am now advised to print my story and await advice from the ingenuity of the American mind.

I have moved into the suburbs and hidden the box and changed my name and my occupation. This I did to escape the curiosity of the reporters. I ought to say that when the government officials came to hear of my in-

heritance, they very reasonably desired to collect the succession tax on my uncle's estate.

I was delighted to assist them. I told the collector my story, and showed him Uncle Philip's letter. Then I offered him the key, and asked for time to get half a mile away. That man said he would think it over and come back later.

This is all I have to say. I have made a will and left my rubies and pearls to the Society for the Prevention of Human Vivisection. If any man thinks this account a joke or an invention, let him coldly imagine the situation:

Given an iron box, known to contain wealth, said to contain dynamite, arranged to explode when the key is used to unlock it—what would any sane man do? What would he advise?

X

THE JEWELS OF CONSISTENCY

THE JEWELS OF CONSISTENCY

THE dead of a graveyard sat in their tombs, for now it was the feast of the Melad, when the dead are as alive and may walk the earth for a night, and neither the angel Moonkir questions, nor the angel Nekeer forbids.

But many missed their bones, and wailed with vain rattle of speech, till one, who was a miser, with dry laughter spake: "What need have I to walk? Here be my bones to sell." Then a woman gave for a leg bone a ring, and another a fillet of gold for a hand; and thus there was soon left of him only a skull, and to that skull some treasures. These others stumbled away rejoicing, and as the muezzin sounded the first sunrise call to prayer clat-

tered into their graves. But at morning came down from the palms monkeys, and took the miser's skull for a ball. The gold and jewels a beggar found, and the fakir and Sufi speaker of verse, Ferishtah, who saw all this wonder, said, "As are the living, so are the dead."

XI

"THOU ART THE SOUL OF THY HOUSE"

"THOU ART THE SOUL OF THY HOUSE"

"THOU ART THE SOUL OF THY HOUSE, AND HE WHO AFTER THEE INHABITS IT WILL KNOW THEE."
PAVEL SYCHOFSKY, M. P. S.

My friend Secton is a Ph.D. in psychometry, and believes that all things created by man have souls, and remember, and are what he calls influential. It is sad nonsense. He believes in lucky and unlucky houses, and in shops where the successive owners always fail. He goes further, and says that it is morally dangerous to live in a house where a murderer has long dwelt, or in which a murder has been done. My doctor says there is only one kind of ghost and that it lives unseen of any in houses where certain kinds of diseases have killed men. This idea

captures my imagination, through my reason, and does appeal to me. As to the other style of ghost, I entirely disbelieve. My friend is hurt when I say that ghosts must be rare, since there is no mention of them in the last census; nor of rattlesnakes, says Secton, who dislikes trifling with the serious, and does not see the logical value of a jest, nor why I grin at his houses with "influential memories."

That doctor of mine also smiles at Secton's queer notions, and taps his forehead indicatively. But then, the doctor is a materialist. So extreme a mystic as Secton is more to my taste. I can readily see why, with that kind of a doctor, my wife remains neither well enough to be of use, nor ill enough to be honestly pitied. He says: "Bah! a ghost. I should put a thermometer under his tongue, and soon know

where he came from."

One night in June, when my wife was away, Secton called at my house in South Kensington, and began at once on his hobby. I smoked and listened, mildly amused. Secton is very persistent. He suspects me of having a little leaven of love of the mystical, which is true of most reflective men.

He said at last: "I have often tested my own belief as to houses. Will you submit your skepticism to a trial?"

I replied that I would.

He said: "I have hired a house for a week. I want you to sleep there two nights. To be brief," he added, "I make no suggestive statement. I have furnished one room, the second story back. Occupy it two successive nights, and, mind you, it is not a question of ghosts."

The next night he called for me.

We had a long drive in a hansom to a suburban house near St. John's Wood. Here Secton gave me a key, and left me at the door.

The dwelling was large, and had a small walled garden behind it. It was about eleven when I lighted the candle I found in the hall, on the floor, for the house was, as he said, unfurnished. It smelt close and musty. I walked through several rooms to a little conservatory. I found nothing unlike a multitude of other so-called villas.

I went to my room, locked the door, lighted three candles, set my shaving-case and toilet affairs on a chair, for want of a table, and went to bed. It is proof of my indifferent attitude of mind that I slept well. I awoke early, about six, and, to my surprise, felt a strange sense of depression, a melancholy so convincing that I seemed of a

sudden to understand how it was that men may desire to die. I sat up with a feeling of horror and of recoil as from an abyss. I struck my repeater. It was after six o'clock. As I looked about me in the dim light, I saw my razor lying open on the bed. It startled me. I was sure I had left it on the chair.

I got up and walked about the room, and after a little began to be more myself. As it was very warm, I opened a window. When I turned toward the bed, the razor, closed, was lying on the chair. I began to dislike the adventure and again to feel the cloud of melancholy, like a shroud, about me.

I dressed and went home, and after breakfast was as usual. By nightfall I had explained it all to my satisfaction, and, reassured, went gaily back to the house.

Nothing unusual happened. I smoked a cigar or two, read a sleep-compelling novel, and went to bed at ten. I woke twice in an hour, conscious each time of fear, the product of dreams which at once faded past recall. After this I was unable to sleep. I was restless and uneasy. At last I got up, and in the darkness had abruptly a sense of alarm which was like a possession; that is, as of a thing, a mood, which owned me. I found a match, and lighted all my three candles. I was in a cold sweat and afraid with the fear a nightmare brings, and with this terror I was, also, in a mood of deep gloom. I dressed and went to a closet to find the novel I had left on the shelf. I was resolved to dismiss these sensations. As I took it, I saw some empty vials, and one which was half full. I took it up, and uncorked it, and

smelt it to learn what it might be. It was laudanum. I staggered across the room with it in my hand, and with an oath threw it into the fireplace. I had resisted the deadliest temptation life had ever set in my way.

I went slowly down-stairs, and must have been in a queer condition, for I seemed to be moving with an onerous use of will power. At last I was out in the air and was at once relieved. After walking about for hours, I reluctantly went back to the house, and up to my room. The fragments of the bottle I had broken when I threw it on the hearth were gone.

As I stood in amazement, looking about me, I felt a slowly gathering renewal of the melancholy of the night before. Was it all a dream—or what? My reason and my will power were affected by the mood of gloom, and by

the desire, the longing to—I would not say it even to that confidant, my own mind. I hastily put my toilet things in a hand-bag, and went away to get, at home, a bath and breakfast. The feeling of depression was with me until evening.

When I called on Secton and made my statement he asked if I were satisfied. I replied that, as to the razor, it must have been a lapse of memory, and possibly—

Secton broke in: "But I say, man, do you leave open razors on your bed and forget them? Or do you mean me to believe that it is a habit of yours to get up in your sleep and shave yourself?"

"But," said I, "how else can I explain it?"

"That is just the question. I can explain it. What about the laudanum?"

I replied that I must have been, in some way, the fool of my own suggestive imagination.

"Well," said he, "you certainly reason very oddly. And so you remain unconvinced."

"Of what am I to be convinced?" I said nothing of my melancholy mood, nor of the temptation. I hated to think of what was an absolutely new, and as surely very humbling, remembrance for a man as decisive as I.

He sneered as he returned: "You wished to test the value of my belief that houses have active memories and may affect, as with a moral malaria, those who live in them."

"Yes; that is put fairly. What of that house—what does it remember?"

"I will tell you. Three persons have taken their lives in that house; no one can live in it."

"Stop!" I said. "Were they all of one family?"

"Yes."

"That," I urged, "seems to me to lessen the value of your test."

"Does it?" he said. "For them, perhaps; but not for you. Now be fair."

I said it required thought.

I think he knew that I had not been entirely frank, for he asked if I would try another night in the same house.

I said, "No." Upon which he replied, smiling:

"I do not ask why. I am satisfied."

Secton has good manners. He might have made himself disagreeable.

XII

A STEP-SON OF KNOWLEDGE

A STEP-SON OF KNOWLEDGE

ONCE, at night, the Caliph, having lost his way, said to one standing where the roads divide, "I have lost my way." Cried the stranger, "How canst thou lose what thou hast never owned?" Then, seeing that he to whom he spake was ill at ease, he added, "Be not dismayed. As is the pig, so is the pearl. Allah hath made both.[1] What one man loses another finds. Thy grandson may be fortunate."

"O dervish, quickener of the soul," said Haroun, "I have found in thy mouth knowledge, but it does not help me to reach home; for, truly, to ask and to get are not as one, and

[1] *This is a little obscure in the original prose. The Arabic of this date is often difficult.*

kibobs of rubies fill not the empty belly."

"Thou art wise with such wisdom as is feeble in the knees," cried the stranger. "Thou hast a vain desire to get somewhere. Better is it never to arrive than to sit on the throne of satisfaction. In the bazaar of the philosophies are no divans."

"Alack," said the Caliph, "I am neither a pig nor a pearl;"[1] and went his way.

[1] *This again is obscure.*

XIII

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

JAMES CARSTAIRS, just home from Africa, was smoking in the Travellers' Club in London. He felt a hand on his shoulder and rose to greet Captain Marston, an old comrade.

Said Marston: "I hope, Jim, you are all right. Heard you brought home a coast fever."

"No, I am well. I have been up among your friends, the Mandingos."

"Well, I suppose you have lots to tell us?"

"By George, yes! Will it suit you to have me dine with you to-morrow? I will bring my photos. I shall be glad to show them to Mrs. Marston. They

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have come out well."

"Yes, of course; delighted to have you."

"Now I must go. I have to meet a committee of the Geographical Society. I lived with the Mandingos six months. I think you were there just twelve years ago."

"Yes. I suppose the infernal man-trade goes on?"

"Oh, worse than ever. After I left for the coast the hunters raided the poor devils."

Said Marston: "I am sorry for that. They were kindly folk, and the women not ill-looking."

"So-so," returned Carstairs. "I saw the lot of slaves later, at Loango, on the coast. I bought off a half-dozen and sent them home. They were fellows who had been very useful to me."

"That was like you, Carstairs."

"Oh, by the way, Marston, among those I set free there was a lad about eleven or twelve, rather light-colored, —had some white blood, I fancy. I bought him too because he took an awful licking and never winced. You will laugh, but my desire to buy him was increased because he reminded me of you."

Marston started. "Of me? What do you mean?"

"Yes; he had a white lock of hair over his left temple, like yours—queer, was n't it?"

"Yes," said Marston. "Unusual, very; but I know two people who have it."

"Well, I never saw it before in a nigger. Oh, by George! it is so jolly good to see you that I almost forgot." He looked up at the clock. "Good-by. At eight to-morrow, you said."

"Yes, at eight. We shall be alone."

"I will show you my maps; and, by the way, I have a photo of the boy."

He went away. Marston sat down, and for a half-hour remained moveless, with his unlighted cigar between his lips. Then he rose, went slowly downstairs, took his hat and his top-coat, and passed out into the street. At the foot of the steps he stood still—and said aloud:

"My God! That's awful!"

THE END